

VZCZCXYZ0000  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHWN #1696/01 2652048  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 222048Z SEP 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3366  
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1499  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL  
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 001696

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [BB](#) [XL](#)  
SUBJECT: EARLY LOOK AT THE NEXT BARBADOS ELECTION

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 1623  
[1](#)B. BRIDGETOWN 239

Classified By: DCM MARY ELLEN T. GILROY for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Peter Wickham, a political insider and a well-connected political consultant based in Barbados (ref B), gives the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP) a good chance of winning the next election, expected in the second half of 2007. The Barbados Labour Party (BLP) could fall victim to its own success, having controlled the government for the past 12 years, which in Wickham's estimation is "too long." Public dissatisfaction over issues such as transportation, housing, and crime will also play into the DLP's hands, but the DLP may need to broaden its message to attract the votes and support it will need. End Summary.

#### DLP's Election to Lose

[1](#)2. (C) In a recent meeting with PolOff, Wickham assessed the current political situation in Barbados as generally favorable to the DLP. Wickham readily admitted to being closer to the DLP than the BLP when it comes to his work as a political consultant and his personal politics, but his extensive and widely recognized experience in Caribbean politics make him a credible source. Wickham attributed the DLP's good prospects not to DLP's agenda or political strategy, but to the fact that there is growing public weariness with a government that has been in power for 12 years. In short, DLP may win the next election because it is not BLP.

[1](#)3. (C) Wickham was, in fact, quite open about the shortcomings of the DLP and its leader, David Thompson, whom Wickham called a personal friend (ref A). Thompson, according to Wickham, suffers from an image problem, which he will have to address before his campaign kicks into full swing. He is perceived more as a Machiavellian political operator than as a statesman and experienced leader ready for the premiership. Thompson has also been less focused on developing concrete policies and solutions to address the problems he is seeking to highlight in advance of the election, including transportation, housing, land ownership, and crime. However, Wickham did not think that these weaknesses would seriously impede Thompson's campaign.

#### BLP's Time Running Out?

[1](#)4. (C) Wickham acknowledged that Prime Minister Owen Arthur and his BLP have been largely successful in leading the

country over the past 12 years. However, this success may have contributed to a certain complacency or, as David Thompson has charged, arrogance in their approach to governing. Wickham speculated that the next election will be decided not by the number of voters who come to the polls, but by the number of voters who choose to stay away rather than re-elect Prime Minister Arthur. By Wickham's estimation, there will be many--or at least enough--such non-voters to hand Thompson the victory.

But Mia's Time Will Come

-----  
15. (C) The BLP could win easily, according to Wickham, if Prime Minister Arthur would step down before the next election in favor of his heir apparent, Mia Mottley, the Deputy Prime Minister. Wickham noted Mottley's immense popularity in Barbados, as well as her political skills, which include a sharp mind and an even sharper tongue. In Wickham's opinion, PM Arthur also recognizes Mottley's star power and will continue to "bask in her glow," but he is determined to keep a firm grip on the BLP reins. He is also not above taking an occasional swipe against Mottley. Wickham is convinced that PM Arthur's recent public focus on family values was aimed indirectly at Mottley, who is widely believed to be gay. Wickham thought that the best thing for Mottley would, in fact, be a BLP loss in the next election, which would force Prime Minister Arthur to retire and allow Mottley to take over the BLP. Wickham had no doubt that Mottley would eventually become the prime minister of Barbados.

Comment

-----  
16. (C) Wickham at one point noted that Thompson could win the next election "with his hands tied behind his back." That is probably overstating Thompson's popularity and skill, and underestimating Prime Minister Arthur and the BLP. Thompson is working hard to show Barbadian voters that the DLP has exorcised its demons, it is united, and it is ready to govern. However, Thompson's shadow cabinet is no match for Prime Minister Arthur's team which, despite some missteps, has a good overall track record. Furthermore, while attacking the BLP on issues like housing and land ownership may resonate with some in the electorate, Thompson may be risking the support of wealthy political contributors, many of whom have profited from the local real estate boom. Since political parties in Barbados, as in other parts of the Caribbean, are largely bankrolled such supporters, Thompson may need to rethink his current populist course in order to broaden his appeal.

KRAMER